



# Working effectively with women and men in water, sanitation and hygiene programs

**Fiji Case Study Snapshot**

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### Acknowledgements

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Government  
the people  
the people  
the people



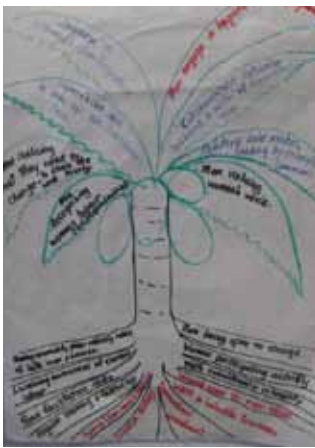
## Fiji Case Study Snapshot

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs have an opportunity to influence the roles women and men take in WASH and relationships between women and men within communities. WASH initiatives provide a potentially powerful entry point for generating positive gender outcomes. During 2009 and 2010, a research project to explore the links between WASH and gender was undertaken by a team from four organisations: the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) at the University of Technology Sydney, the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), Live and Learn Environmental Education Fiji (Live & Learn) and World Vision Vanuatu. The research was supported by AusAID through the Australian Development Research Awards grants program.

The research focused on Melanesian communities engaged with non-government organisation (NGO) WASH programs in Fiji (July 2009) and Vanuatu (October 2009). In Fiji, two communities participated in the research, both of which had been engaged with Live & Learn projects between 2004 and 2007. The projects were i) Water Governance and ii) Developing Sustainable Communities. The Governing Water Project aimed to raise awareness about principles of good governance and promote inter-ethnic dialogue using water as a community entry issue and 'Learning Circles' as an implementation tool. In using the Learning Circles approach, Live & Learn placed particular emphasis on socially inclusive community engagement strategies.

The methodology used in this study allowed community participants to share their own ideas about what women and men valued as changes resulting from the project with regard to women's and men's roles and relationships. A strengths-based research approach was used, informed by principles of empowerment, appreciation and participation. The aim was to support a constructive reflection and learning process for community members, NGO staff and researchers. In each case study community, the research team spent two days working with 10-20 men and approximately 20 women. Research activities included story-telling, group discussion, prioritisation, visioning and a pocket voting activity..

This summary details seven positive outcomes arising from Live & Learn WASH projects that were repeatedly mentioned through these various research activities by women and men in two Fijian communities and describes the major enablers of these outcomes. Names of the communities have been changed to preserve anonymity.



### Increased sense of community unity, through men and women working together

Women and men valued how they had worked together to contribute to community-level activities such as waste management and community sanitation. Compared with in the past, the project was considered by the community to have led to increased levels of cooperation and collaboration between women and men, and particularly, men taking a stronger role in areas where they were previously absent. While community participants referred to this notion as 'working together', this usually meant that groups of women and groups of men worked towards a common community goal on specific and different tasks and in roles that were complementary to one another.

**“** We do different jobs but together. Now men do their part. Before it was left to the women. **”**

*Senikau Village older man*

## Women's efforts to promote community sanitation and health are recognised

Women put into action the skills and activities suggested in Live & Learn's learning circles and this was noticed by men and women. They took the lead and as such gained recognition for their efforts from men in the community, and in some cases inspired men to participate too. This recognition of women's increased role in development at the community level was also a strong contributor to increased respect for women and their increased voice at community level.

**“** *Men acknowledge the amount of work the women have done and their role...The change is the recognition.* **”**

*Senikau Village man*

## Women are working together and supporting each other

Through the Live & Learn project, women started to collaborate between themselves to a greater extent than previously, resulting both in concerted action to improve sanitation and improved relationships between women. There was a sense that by working collectively and by uniting their voices, women were able to achieve more than when working alone.

**“** *Women are working together and are very supportive of each other...After the training we started sitting together and discussed what we could do together as a women's group...We see the advantage of working together as women...We have pride in the work we have done, we feel proud of what we have done.* **”**

*Senitoa Village woman*

## Women are more respected by men and feel more valued

This outcome related to both household and wider community experiences. Women felt they were more respected and valued by the men in their community, and men expressed increased respect for women and recognition of the roles women play and their labour.

**“** *The response to women has changed, they are more listened to, there is more trust of women. Whatever project women take a lead in, it is a success.* **”**

*Senikau Village woman*

### **Women have an increased voice at the community level**

Compared with the past, women and men identified that more space was being made for women to speak, to be heard, and to influence decisions at the community level. There were also improvements noted in women’s confidence to speak and with regard to women being given explicit opportunity to bring forward ideas and opinions in a community setting. According to men and women, women’s voices and views were ‘heard’ to a greater extent than in the past, and there were shifts in the outcomes of decisions through taking into account women’s views. Within the cultural context, increased women’s voice was generally seen as positive by men in that it supported traditional leadership arrangements.

**“** *Recently a big change has been women being allowed to talk during the village meeting.*

*Senitoa Village woman*

*Men are able to listen to the women more compared to the past.* **”**

*Senikau Village man*

### **Communication between husband and wife has improved**

There were perceived improvements in the relationship between women and men within the household. Many referred to greater ‘love and listening’ in the household. This outcome also referred to improvements in how issues are resolved at the household level, how roles and tasks are negotiated and shared, how household decisions are made, and how women and their work are valued.





“ I have changed how I manage my family, for example how to manage health...Now I play more and different roles – I weed grass in front of house, help manage waste, and support my wife. ”

Senittoa Village man

### **Men are participating more in household sanitation and water management**

As a result of the Live & Learn projects, traditional household roles had shifted. Women played leading roles in implementing household and community sanitation initiatives during the project. The success of initiatives impressed the men and inspired them to participate more in household level sanitation activities.

“ Before the women used to do all of the carrying of the water from the river...The women then negotiated at the household level that the men should carry the water also – they share the labour now. ”

Senittoa Village woman

## What enabled these outcomes?

### NGO approach

Live & Learn's inclusive approach was critical to the positive outcomes that eventuated.

- Live & Learn's learning circles approach has a strong emphasis on inclusion and incorporates the use of tried and tested educational resources.
- Live & Learn projects met real needs and responded to what community members wanted. The approach was developed in response to the results of research on attitudes and perceptions of communities relating to water governance conducted at the outset of the project.
- Staff engaged community participants in discussions on why activities were important, which contributed to pride and satisfaction in resultant outcomes.
- The projects used water as an entry point to talk about governance, leadership and inclusion.
- Live & Learn's overall ways of working contributed to the positive outcomes, including building on past projects and long term relationships, trialling and testing of different approaches, drawing on a network of stakeholders and regular follow up and encouragement.

### Community strengths

Women in both communities noted that working hard and 'from the heart' was important, and that it was because they were 'true to the task they were undertaking' that many of the outcomes eventuated. They identified a willingness to share skills with each other and work together as contributing to positive outcomes, and noted that sharing knowledge and skills resulted in increased confidence when negotiating with men. In both communities, women also identified a commitment to spirituality and respect for household and community leadership as underlying strengths.

Men stressed the importance of having new ideas introduced into the community. Men commented that the participatory approach used by Live & Learn had changed their ideas and motivated them. One elder in Senitoa Village pointed out that 'training is important, but changing the way we think is something different'.

More generally, improved communication and recognition of different perspectives enabled women's participation in decision making processes. As one man said, 'many voices are better than one'.

For further information and other resources, please see [www.genderinpacificwash.info](http://www.genderinpacificwash.info)

